

Artistic carvings

Exotic wood pieces take on a new life in Cohen's hands

By Al Kaufman
Staff Writer

Most retirees moving to Florida look for a house or a condo. Morris Cohen looked for a two-car garage.

Without it, he explained, he wouldn't have enough space to sculpture and "without sculpturing, life can be very dull."

Fortunately for Cohen — and the art world — he found the garage (with a house attached) in Coco Wood Lakes, a Delray Beach subdivision.

Here, Cohen is producing exotic wood carvings that have brought plaudits, and lucrative sales, from art patrons all over the United States.

He has also received many awards and prizes including a first at the Lincoln Center Outdoor Exhibit in New York City for his *Galatea*.

Other Cohen objects have been exhibited in galleries and museums in New York, New Jersey and South Florida. His sculptures are now on view until June 5 at Patch Reef Park Community Center on Yamato Road west of Military Trail.

All are one-of-a-kind. All tell a story about wood.

A living thing

"Wood is a living thing," says the 78-year-old artist who started life as a cloak maker in New York city's garment district.

"Wood is affected by wind, rain and

fire. It tells stories about itself. It tells me things and tells me what to make."

Cohen said he came upon a piece of wood with striking black lines and thick features which brought to mind

an African warrior. The finished work, almost life-size, is a striking example of the artist's skill.

It is part of the Patch Park exhibit. Its value is estimated in the thousands

of dollars.

Another piece of wood, parts of which originally resembled a pouch, turned into a pregnant woman after Cohen painstakingly completed his carving.

Cohen's best comes from such exotic woods as Rosewood, Zerawood and Temawood. He shops for them with the patience and diligence of a rare gem buyer. Over 26 years, he has carved more than 200 pieces and sold them as fast as they were finished.

Not on the market

Today, his works are no longer on the market because "I want to leave something to my children and grandchildren," he says, "and besides, they bring me and my wife great pleasure."

Although a senior, Cohen often works 10 to 12 hours a day. He carves two or three pieces to relieve the strain of working on a single piece. Sometimes he will complete a sculpture in two months — others may take up to two years.

Cohen came to New York city from Poland at age 13. He turned from garment work to auto mechanics and the garage business "because I wanted to work with my hands."

Real estate later brought financial success but sculpting, he says, with a broad smile, brought relaxation and happiness.

His destiny

"Wood has fascinated me more than
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CREATIVE CARVER ... Morris Cohen stands amidst some of the works that have made him an award-winner.

Staff photo by BILL KALINA

Carvings

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anything else. It has given me the the opportunity to work with my hands. I knew what my destiny was when a friend in the wood importing business gave me a beautiful piece of wood as a present."

Cohen studied sculpting in New

York.

His wife, Eve, is his best and foremost critic. She says of her husband: "You don't have to get old if you think positive — and that's what life is all about. Morris is a positive man. It is reflected in his creations."